Summary of the doctoral (PhD) dissertation

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Peer impact on the development of intergroup attitudes: a contextualised multi-method analysis

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In 2005 the Athletics World Championship was in Helsinki - the first one Michael, a 6 year old boy in my family would watch. In the final of the 800 metres race, his grandmother pointed out the Kenyan athlete she chose to support. To her utmost surprise Michael said: 'I won't support him, he's Black and he stinks". In 1:44.55 minutes William Yiampoy finished third, and that evening the boy and his parents embarked on a longish discussion.

My family takes pride of providing a multicultural upbringing in a rather homogenous society, so we were bewildered, there was no question of Michael learning this from us. Though smell might be part of the stereotype on Black people, the media would not transmit this message and his teachers would not make such comments either. The most likely possible source was his friends, which was exactly what the discussion revealed. As a future scholar I sat down to read what the literature would offer to understand the phenomenon and found surprisingly few studies on peer impact on young children's developing intergroup attitudes.

Several strands of literature suggested though that by the age of 5-6, bottom-up processes of peer impact could play a significant role in the development of children's intergroup attitudes. Firstly, peers are important interactional partners in social development in general (Bruner, 1990; Cillessen, 2009; Vygotsky, 1986). Children create shared interpretations, discourses and practices in peer groups reconstructing elements from the adult world, while also creating and sharing idiosyncratic elements from an early age (Corsaro & Eder, 1990; Mérei & Binét, 1980). Secondly, for adolescents peer impact is known to have substantial influence on the development of intergroup attitudes. Analysing intergroup attitudes in peer networks showed that adolescents attitudes are dependent on peers' attitudes towards ethnic, racial groups (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2011) or sexual minorities (Poteat, 2007; Poteat & Spanierman, 2010), though attitudes only converge on salient target groups (Kiesner, Maass, Cadinu, & Vallese, 2003). Similarly, shared and highly adversarial intergroup interpretations, discourses and practices emerged among competing pre-adolescents as the

result of intensive intergroup conflict in the classic Robber's cave study (Sherif & Sherif, 1980).

Consequently, the third question is whether 5-6-year-old children could be important interactional partners in specifically the development of intergroup attitudes. By this age, the necessary socio-cognitive skills and motivation are present. Age 5-6 is the crucial point in the socio-cognitive development of intergroup attitudes when children already have the skills for a wide array of intergroup attitudes (Aboud, 2008; Aboud & Amato, 2001). In addition, by age 5 children are responsive to perceived group norms on intergroup attitudes (Nesdale, 2011; Nesdale & Dalton, 2011), though these influences have not been tested with peer norms. Therefore, 5-6-year old children could significantly contribute to the development of their peer's intergroup attitudes.

However, previous studies on peer impact showed mixed results with this age group. The one highly influential quantitative study directly addressing peer impact at age 5-6 found no convergence in the intergroup attitudes of friends' dyads (Aboud & Doyle, 1996). In contrast, ethnographic studies of intergroup relations performed in pre-schools and kindergartens in the U.S. and U.K. demonstrated how nuanced intergroup interpretations, discourses and practices on salient groups are shared among peers (Connolly, 1998; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2002). Building on other previous studies finding peer convergence, there could be at least 2 reasons why Aboud and Doyle did not detect it. Firstly, target groups need to be salient for attitudes to converge (Kiesner, et al., 2003), which was not measured by Doyle and Aboud. Secondly, their study investigated friendship dyads, though peer networks capture several social processes more accurately than dyads (Cillessen, 2009) including changes in intergroup attitudes among adolescents (Poteat, 2007; Poteat & Spanierman, 2010). Consequently, focusing on salient target groups and peer networks of interaction groups suggests itself to be a more promising avenue to investigate peer impact with children.

Besides such bottom-up peer processes intergroup attitudes would be highly contextualised as well, shaped by top-down processes from the local and societal context. With perceptually salient target groups, children take cues from the local context of intergroup practices and structures in the development of their intergroup attitudes. Gender or ethnic-racial segregation, for example, signals the importance of those social categories and also provides information on the social position of groups (Bigler & Liben, 2006, 2007). Furthermore, institutional norms on intergroup relations influence adolescents' attitudes (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002) and as 5-year-old children are responsive to ingroup norms (Nesdale, 2011; Nesdale & Dalton, 2011), local institutional norms could already shape 5-year-old's intergroup attitudes. In addition, higher proportion of minority students in a setting is often related to more negative intergroup attitudes among adolescents, as these minority peers might become threatening (Mouw & Entwisle, 2006) unless local norms or intergroup friendship counterbalance such effects (Moody, 2001). Furthermore, societal context shapes children's intergroup attitudes through the representations of discoursively salient target groups. In the case of highly salient discourses such as in the Israeli intractable conflict even 3-year-old-children's intergroup attitudes are dependent the societal discourse (Bar-Tal, 1996) and in less conflictual settings older age groups' intergroup attitudes are dynamically linked to outgroup representations (Verkuyten & Zaremba, 2005). In addition, the local and societal context indirectly shapes attitudes through the intergroup practices and structures children are exposed to.

In the Hungarian intergroup context the Roma are the largest ethnic minority group, who are the target of widespread discrimination (see Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2012 for a recent review of NGO, governmental and intergrovernmental reports), highly negative intergroup attitudes among adults and adolescents (Csákó, 2011; Gimes, Juhász, Kiss, Krekó, & Somogyi, 2008; Murányi, 2010; Örkény & Váradi, 2010) and salient

discourses of Roma portraying the group as threatening, criminal, anti-social and inferior (Gimes, et al., 2008; Messing & Bernáth, 2012). Immigration is relatively low in the European context, though the small Asian and African immigrant groups are highly visible (Hárs, 2010). Both groups are also targets of negative intergroup attitudes though these are less negative than those towards the Roma (Enyedi, Fábián, & Sik, 2004; Ligeti, 2006). Discourses are less salient, too and share the "othering" of both groups i.e. distancing outgroup members as very different from ingroup members and also defining group members as non-Hungarian. Adolescent representations of Chinese people are mostly based on intergroup contact experiences with Asian vendors percieved as thrifty while representations of Black people are more positive and focus on interpersonal warmth and exceptional dancing skills (Szilassy, 2006).

A further antecedent of children's intergroup attitudes, their intergroup contact experiences are also embedded in these local and societal contexts. In general, positive contact, especially friendship improves intergroup attitudes among children (Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright, 2011; Tropp & Prenovost, 2010), however negative contact exacerbates intergroup attitudes with a stronger effect in adult samples (Barlow et al., 2012). Furthermore, direct intergroup contact improves intergroup attitudes more than extended or indirect contact which are most relevant in the absence of direct contact (Cameron, Rutland, Douch, & Brown, 2006; Cameron, Rutland, Hossain, & Petley, 2011; Cameron, Rutland, Turner, Holman-Nicolas, & Powell, 2011). In the Hungarian context, as the Roma are not necessarily perceptually distinguishable, the impact of contact with Roma people will also be contingent on the children identifying their contact partners as Roma.

Finally, development of intergroup attitudes is intertwined with children's socio-cognitive development. After age 5-6 children have the necessary socio-cognitive skills for positive intergroup attitudes (Aboud, 1988, 2008) and attitudes improve for several target

groups e.g. racial-ethnic groups in the U.S or Canada. However, not all target groups are viewed more favourably e.g. national outgroups are not. Furthermore, neither do intergroup attitudes improve in other settings towards racial-ethnic groups (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). These findings suggest that besides the socio-cognitive skills, perceived anti-bias norms are also necessary (Nesdale, 2011). In addition, the minority ethnic identity developed by minority children could be related to more positive attitudes towards their ingroup; however, in the U.S. several studies fail to find ingroup favouritism among minority children at age 5-6, suggesting internalised racism or system justification from age five onwards (Banaji, Baron, Dunham, & Olson, 2010; Baron & Banaji, 2009; Newheiser & Olson, 2012)

In sum, the main aim of this thesis is to investigate the following: 1. whether children's intergroup attitudes are shaped by peer impact and related to bottom-up processes from the children's peer groups, which has not been the focus of previous studies with 5-7-year-old children. In addition, acknowledging the importance of further factors, the research aims to show how children's developing intergroup attitudes are related to 2. top-down processes from the children's local context such as institutional norms and ethnic composition, 3. top-down processes from the children's societal context such as salient discourses, representations and societal attitudes, 4. their individual intergroup contact experiences with the target groups and 5. their socio-cognitive development.

Methods

Participants

139 children in nine kindergarten groups of varying ethnic composition (from now on referred to as Groups 1., 2., 3. etc.) participated in the research, complete kindergarten groups were sampled within randomly chosen kindergartens in different administrative quarters of Budapest, response rate was 80% within the kindergarten groups. Mean age was 5 years 9

months with a minimum of 3 years 11 months and a maximum of 7 years 3 months. The sample was gender balanced with 72 boys (52%) and 67 girls (48%). Ethnic identity data is available in Groups 5. 6. 7. 8. & 9. with 46 majority Hungarian children, 11 children identified as Roma, 16 children were identified as Roma by teachers and parents without identifying as Roma themselves, there were 2 Black children and 2 Chinese children. There is no data on the ethnic identity of 62 children in Groups 1., 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. & 9. In Groups 5. 6. 7. 8. & 9. the kindergarten teachers were also interviewed.

Measures and procedure

Each child was surveyed about two different outgroups. For Groups 1. 2. 3. & 4 Roma and Blacks were the target group, for Groups 5. 6. 7. 8. & 9. Roma and Chinese were the target groups. Firstly, an adapted version of Preschool Racial Attitude Measure (PRAM) II was employed (Williams, Boswell, Mattson and Graves, 1975) to measure the valence of intergroup attitudes relating to Roma, Black and Chinese people. There were 7 positive and 7 negative attributes to be paired with pictures of ingroup and outgroup member children of matching gender. The scores range from -7 to + 7, higher scores indicate more negative intergroup attitudes. Secondly, stereotype content and complexity and intergroup contact experiences with target group members were explored through a semi-structured interview which was transcribed verbatim. General attributes of the target group were coded as stereotypes, and the number of features mentioned about each target group is used as an indicator of stereotype complexity. Qualitative analysis was also performed to identify and categorise stereotype elements shared by children. Specific instances of intergroup encounters mentioned in the interviews were coded as intergroup contact and the type of situation and its valence were both coded. Thirdly, social relations within kindergarten groups were investigated through a sociometric test adapted from a recent Hungarian dissertation on children's social relations (Inántsy-Pap, 2003) with one positive nomination in

groups 1-4 and 3 positive and 3 negative nominations in groups Groups 5. 6. 7. 8. & 9. to identify peers in close interaction groups that children are closest to socially. Finally, an identity survey was implemented in groups Groups 5. 6. 7. 8. & 9. based on previous studies on multiple identities among children (Akiba, Szalacha, & García Coll, 2004). Procedures followed the same format with all child participants – measures were administered in two sessions of 15-20 minute each. In groups Groups 5. 6. 7. 8. & 9. kindergarten teachers were also interviewed about their practices and observations relating to ethnicity, multiculturalism or diversity in the kindergarten and enumerated which children belong to ethnic minority groups in their opinion. In addition, measures were repeated after 6 months in Groups 8. & 9. with both child and teacher participants, though the data was not used in the analysis as valence of intergroup attitudes and ethnic identification was not significantly different across time and no software was available at the time to analyse the longitudinal sociometric data. Finally, in Group 9. observations were also conducted, though these were not satisfactorily reliable and consequently are not employed. All data was collected and analysed by the candidate, 10% of the interviews were analysed by a second coder with 76% inter-coder reliability. Active written consent was obtained from parents and informed verbal consent from the children themselves, participants and at request parents were debriefed following the studies.

Results and discussion

Developing intergroup attitudes and bottom-up processes in peer groups

Peers' intergroup attitudes showed high similarity for all three target groups with higher similarity among close peers in the valence of intergroup attitudes, the complexity of stereotypes and the content of stereotypes as well. Individual intergroup attitudes were closely correlated with the aggregated intergroup attitudes of the close interaction groups in both the

valence of intergroup attitudes and complexity of stereotypes for all three target groups (valence of intergroup attitudes and complexity of stereotypes respectively for Roma target group r=.59, p=.013 and r=.65, p=.056; Black target group r=.60, p=.095 and r=.45, p=000; Chinese target group r=.65, p=.000 and r=.55, p=.000). For the kindergarten groups the correlations for all three target groups for both intergroup measures were weaker though in most cases significant (valence of intergroup attitudes and complexity of stereotypes respectively for Roma target group r=.29, p=.001 and r=.46, p=.000; Black target group r=.34, p=.012 and r=.22, p=.098; Chinese target group r=.30, p=.010 and r=.13, p=.332). Furthermore, hierarchical multiple regressions run with aggregated intergroup attitude scores of close interaction groups, identity, gender, age and intergroup contact measures confirm that the aggregated intergroup attitude scores are the best predictors of individual intergroup attitudes (valence of intergroup attitudes and complexity of stereotypes respectively for Roma target group ΔR^2=0.36, β=.60***, ΔR^2=0.41, β=.64***, Black target group ΔR^2=0.36, β=.60***, ΔR^2=0.20, β=.45***, Chinese target group ΔR^2=0.49, β=.70***, ΔR^2=0.38, β=.61***). Stereotype content was also shared among interaction group peers and kindergarten peers with some elements shared among peers but not across other groups e.g. “the Roma are the bogeyman who would take us away if we misbehave” was mentioned by 4 children, all of them in one kindergarten group.

The intergroup attitudes converged towards all three target groups, though only the Roma target group was salient in all groups. For the Roma target group, convergence in stereotype content also suggested previous discussions as children in some groups shared idiosyncratic stereotype content that cannot be based on experience such as the above Roma are the bogeyman example. However, the Black and Chinese target groups were not detectably salient in most groups based on the teacher interviews, which raises the question whether the convergence is due to previous discussions among the children or to shared or

similar experiences. The convergence in stereotype content points more towards such shared or similar experiences – many children would describe similar intergroup contact experiences with Chinese vendors or restaurateurs for example affecting their intergroup attitudes in similar fashion.

Developing intergroup attitudes in the local context

Intergroup attitudes and stereotype content varied across kindergarten groups even after controlling for intergroup contact effects showing that the local context is related to the valence of intergroup attitudes (towards Roma target group $F(8, 87)=1.87$, p. =07 towards Black target group $F(3, 46) = 2.28$, $p=.09$ and towards Chinese target groups $F(1, 48) = 2.02$, $p=.01$). Though the literature suggests that multicultural or anti-racist norms are related to more positive intergroup attitudes, in this sample neither the teacher nor the children interviews attested to the existence of such norms, consequently, this prediction could not be tested. Meanwhile, high perceived proportion of Roma in the kindergarten group was related to more negative intergroup attitudes towards Roma, $t(14,93) = 1.99$, $p <.10$ without such anti-bias norms.

Developing intergroup attitudes in the societal context

The valence of intergroup attitudes towards the three target group and the content of stereotypes also reflected the societal context. The valence of intergroup attitudes was most negative intergroup attitudes towards Roma, M=3.2. S.D.=3.45 (on a scale of -7 to 7 with higher positive scores indicating stronger bias against a target group) and less negative towards the Black, M=1.96, S.D.=4.47 and Chinese target group, M=2.12, S.D.=3.15 in line with the societal intergroup attitudes. The differences among the target group scores are significant, for Roma and Black $t(53)=2.68$, $p=.010$, for Roma and Chinese $t(74)=3.00$, $p=.004$. Societal representations were also reconstructed in the children's stereotype content,

especially for the Roma target group. Several elements of the highly salient discourse, such as threatening criminality and violence, anti-social behaviour and features such as dirtiness and being loud and notions of inferiority such as being stupid and ugly were part of the children's stories, too with high levels of fear and disgust expressed. For the Black target group where the societal discourse is less salient, some elements such as interpersonal warmth and dancing were shared with older age group's discourses while for both the Black and Chinese target group their "othering" and defining group members as non-Hungarians was a shared feature with general representations.

Developing intergroup attitudes and individual intergroup contact experiences

A large majority of children had intergroup contact with some of the outgroups with considerable variation in closeness and valence of such contacts and related differences in the contact-attitude link across outgroups. These differences are due to both the available contact situations and the perceptual distinguishability of the different outgroups. Though almost all the groups had some children identifying as Roma, their identity was not communicated to their group mates in many cases, and they were not perceptually distinguishable for the children. Consequently, contact with them was not reported as intergroup contact by most children. Therefore 28 % of all contact with Roma involved indirect contact through parent's and siblings' experiences or the media while 21 % involved superficial contact where adults identified people seen on the street as Roma and both types of contact were largely negative (59% of all contact with Roma was negative). These experiences were actually related to more negative intergroup attitudes both for indirect contact, $r=.21$, $p=.042$ (higher intergroup attitude scores mean more negative attitudes) and superficial contact, $r=.25$, $p=.012$ and as such experiences abounded intergroup contact overall was related to more negative intergroup attitudes, $r=.22$, $p=.035$.

Though there are much less opportunities for direct contact with Black people as they are a small group in Hungary, they are an easily distinguishable outgroup and seeing Black people on the street is reported as 55 % of all contact. These experiences are largely neutral and are not related to changes in the valence of intergroup attitudes, r=.09, p=.523 but are related to higher stereotype complexity, r=.34, p=.008. Group mates from mixed Black and White marriages were not necessarily categorized as Black, but the few instances of friendship with Black children was related to more positive intergroup attitudes, r=-.34, p=.013. Due to these largely neutral and distant contact experiences, contact overall was not related to differences in the valence of intergroup attitudes, r=.03, p=849 but was related to higher stereotype complexity, r=.39, p=.002.

Finally, Chinese people are highly visible, too and if there is a Chinese child in the group, they are categorized as Chinese by most of their group mates and these experiences (41% of overall contact) are related to more positive intergroup attitudes, r=-.26, p=.056. Superficial interactions with Chinese people (with all Asians presumably categorized as Chinese (Nguyen, 2012)) in service jobs is the most common other form of contact (35%) with mostly neutral valence and these intergroup experiences are not related to differences in intergroup attitudes. Overall as contact was relatively close and neutral or positive it was related to more positive intergroup attitudes, r=-.28, p=.040 and higher stereotype complexity, r=.26, p=.063.

Developing intergroup attitudes and children's socio-cognitive development

As their socio-cognitive development unfolds, after age 5-6 children's intergroup attitudes become more positive for some groups when they perceive an anti-bias norm. In the current sample the teacher and child interviews did not attest to the existence of such anti-bias norms and in accordance age is not related significantly to the valence of intergroup attitudes towards any target group. However, in the case of the salient Roma target groups, stereotypes

get more complex with age, b=.03, β=.30, R2=.09, F(1, 104)=10.25, p=.002 presumably as exposure to societal discourses accumulates.

Looking at the ethnic identification of the minority children, identifying as Roma or being identified as Roma by the teachers is related to more positive intergroup attitudes towards Roma but not to other target groups, M=65.94, 95% CI [57.11, 74.77] with higher mean scores for majority, M=75.46, 95% CI [68.24, 82.28], ANOVA is marginally significant F(1,72)=2.79, p=.099. However, for those children who do not identify as Roma though their parents or teachers identify them as Roma, there is no significant difference from the majority children's intergroup attitudes F(1,63)=1.571, p=.215. Due to the small numbers of self-identified Roma children, unfortunately they could not be contrasted with the majority directly. These results still suggest that minority group identification could be a buffer, but without ethnic identification minority children themselves are subject to the same peer and societal influences as majority children, marking the beginning of internalized racism.

Conclusions

The results demonstrated that 5-6-year-old children share intergroup attitudes on salient target groups within their peer groups. The present research is the first to focus on this issue and document such convergence with both qualitative and quantitative measures. These results are in line with interactional approaches to social development (Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 1986) and also confirm ethnographic findings describing sophisticated use of salient racial and ethnic categories with this 5-6 year age group in different intergroup settings such as the U.S. or the U.K (Ausdale & Feagin, 1996; Connolly, 1998). Contrary to previous findings on lack of shared intergroup attitudes among dyads of friends (Aboud & Doyle, 1996), the network approach to children's social relations employed here to detect convergence did capture peer impact (Cillessen, 2009).

The results also suggest that there are different mechanisms of convergence depending on the discoursive or perceptual salience of the target group in society. These two dimensions of salience are separate in the Hungarian context as the most discoursively salient target group, the Roma are perceptually not distinguishable for the children whereas Black or Chinese people are perceptually salient but the societal discourse about them is far less so. In accordance, the research documents that the convergence on intergroup attitudes towards Roma is at least partly due to discussions among children – some idiosyncratic stereotype elements that cannot be based on actual intergroup experience are shared in a group. In contrast, for the Black and Chinese target group the convergence might be based on shared or similar experiences, the content of stereotypes mainly reflect effects of direct and indirect intergroup contact.

These different types of salience will also have consequences on how and when different factors contribute to the development of intergroup attitudes, whether transmission through discourses or intergroup contact experiences weigh more heavily. The current research documents how different types of salience have consequences on the effect of intergroup contact. As the Roma are not perceptually distinguishable for most children, having a self-identified Roma peer often has no impact on intergroup attitudes as their identity is not communicated to their peers. In addition, as perceptual distinguishability is just as low outside the kindergarten, indirect contact is more relevant which often means exposure to negative societal discourses. In contrast, the Black and Chinese target group are highly perceptually salient, consequently even superficial intergroup contact is related to intergroup attitudes. Such a distinction between different types of salience is highly relevant from a global perspective on intergroup development – in many intergroup settings and relations perceptual cues would not be readable for children. However, it is lacking from even the most

contextualized intergroup developmental theories (Bigler & Liben, 2007; Teichman & Bar-Tal, 2008).

From an applied perspective, the most important result is that from an early age on, children are responsive to societal and local representations and norms. Societal intergroup relations and representations impact the discourses children are exposed to which are directly related to their intergroup attitudes. In addition, intergroup relations impact the intergroup contact situations available to children inside and outside institutional caregiving settings. The local context could also be relevant in setting anti-bias norms (Nesdale, 2011; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002) which was not the case in this sample. Though children have the necessary socio-cognitive skills for improved intergroup attitudes after age 5-6 (Aboud, 1988, 2008) and are responsive to norms on intergroup relations (Nesdale, 2011; Nesdale & Dalton, 2011), as there was no indication of anti-bias norms in any of the kindergartens, attitudes did not improve with age. An obvious practical implication of such findings is the need for early intervention. Hopefully such an intervention would also have an impact on the development of ingroup attitudes of minority children who would not be subject to peer processes that might lead to internalized racism.

The study had several limitations as well, most obviously the current sample size in a field study limits the generalizability of the findings. Taking into consideration how hard it is to access such a sample though, the mixed methods enabled the collection of complex data. The richness of the dataset then allowed for a detailed contextualized analysis, with novel interpretations and the opening of further research questions. For example, further experimental studies could test whether different types of salience are related to differential processes of intergroup development. In addition, though several of the research questions would ideally be investigated in a multilevel framework to precisely account for individual and contextual processes simultaneously, the sample size again was a limitation here that

could be overcome in further field studies. Furthermore, to understand processes of convergence in groups longitudinal data is necessary to separate selection processes from social influence processes, while only the cross-sectional dataset could be employed in this study thus calling for further observations with a longer time span or more sophisticated measures.

Finally, the research also showed that there could be several agents of change in the development of intergroup attitudes. Educational policy makers, media content providers, caregiving institutions, teachers and parents could all impact the intergroup development dynamics. I can only finish this dissertation expressing high hopes that this would be the case in Hungary in the near future.

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